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Andrews, Lynda M. and Drennan, Judy (2007) Extending Holt's (1995) Typology of Consumption to Examine The Marketing Domain in Experiential Consumption. In *Proceedings 2007 Australia And New Zealand Marketing Academy Conference (ANZMAC)*, pages pp. 3015-3022, Dunedin, New Zealand.

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# **Extending Holt's (1995) Typology of Consumption to Examine the Marketing Domain in the Experiential Consumption of Mobile Phones**

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## **Abstract**

The study reported in this paper examines how consumers contextualise mobile marketing (m-marketing) as part of their everyday experiential consumption practices with their mobile phones. Based on Holt's (1995) four metaphors of consumption, the findings in this study suggest that this typology can be extended to include a fifth dimension. This extension permits research into people's everyday experiential consumption practices that includes the marketing domain.

## **Introduction**

Mobile phones can be contextualised as having value in terms of its shared symbolic meanings (Holt, 1995). However, this technology also can be contextualised as having economic value that provides particular benefits to the consumer (Holt, 1995). Emerging research in this direction tests models of consumer acceptance and consumer responses to mobile advertising (e.g. Carroll *et al.*, 2007; Haghirian, Madlberger, M., Tanuskova, 2005). A way to explore the economic perspectives of contextualised value in a mobile phone is to examine the surrounding consumption practices, that is, how a person understands, evaluates, appreciates and uses consumption objects in particular contexts (Holt, 1995). Interpretive studies of this nature are limited and form an under-researched area in consumer behaviour (Grant and O'Donohoe, 2007). To address this gap we use an interpretive research method to examine how individuals' contextualise their experiences of m-marketing as consumption practices.

## **Experiential Consumption of Mobile Phones**

The experiential value of mobile phones as consumption practices is explored in other disciplines. For example, Taylor and Harper (2001) contextualise practices with mobile phone as forms of *gifting*, [providing selected people with their mobile phone number]. Ling (2001) and Palen *et al.* (2001) examine how the mobile phone is contextualised in terms of practices signifying evolving status and for additional uses beyond that for which it was originally purchased. Ropke (2003) examines how this technology is contextualised as *domesticated* through practices that influence the consumption dynamics and environmental impacts of everyday life. While individuals' social and communicative consumption practices with mobile phones have been explored, there is significantly less attention on how individuals contextualise marketing experiences in terms of everyday consumption practices.

Ownership and usage of a highly experiential product, such as the mobile phone, opens up opportunities for consumers to engage in further consumption practices that are marketing based (Grant and O'Donohoe, 2007). These m-marketing practices offer new ways of living and enhance individuals' lifestyles, their leisure opportunities as well as personal and social

needs (Carroll *et al.*, 2002). The notion of consumer perceived “mobile value” (Ankar and D’Incau, 2002, p. 47) through accessing mobile services, mobile Internet, m- marketing and m-commerce is important. However, it is acknowledged that successful take-up of these m-marketing experiences will be driven by the consumer’s perceptions of these offerings’ value as part of a mobile lifestyle (Carroll *et al.*, 2002; Grant and O’Donohoe, 2007). The more experiential value the consumer perceives that this technology offers, the more likely they are to integrate a range of marketing-based relationships that offer this value (e.g. Carroll *et al.*, 2002). In turn, the more valuable these marketing relationships are perceived to be, the more valuable the mobile phone becomes to facilitate the individual’s mobile world (Sullivan Mort and Drennan, 2005). While Grant and O’Donohoe (2007) found only weak motivations for using mobile phones for marketing purposes among young people, the experiential value of mobile phones can be viewed as a dynamic process that evolves during the consumer’s relationship with the technology and other entities (Palen *et al.*, 2001). Therefore, it should be possible for consumers to contextualise their marketing relationships as everyday experiential consumption practices, as m-marketing evolves over time (Grant and O’Donohoe, 2007). This review highlights a gap in the literature to be addressed through a research question stated as: ***How do individuals experience m-marketing as part of their everyday mobile phone consumption practices?***

### **Methodology and Research Design**

The experiential view of consumption (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) provides a suitable methodology as it acknowledges that consumption is phenomenological and includes symbolic, subjective or hedonic meanings. Holt’s (1995) four metaphors of consumption is used as the theoretical framework. These metaphors are identified as *consuming as experience*, *consuming as integration*, *consuming as classification* and *consuming as play* (definitions provided in Table 1). They form a typology for understanding the phenomenological dimensions underlying individuals’ experiences with products or services through the consumption practices in which they engage (Holt, 1995). The typology is used for identifying insights into the experiential consumption of mobile phones. Additionally, they provide a springboard to examine how m-marketing might be contextualised as consumption practices in an extension of this typology.

Data collection involved interpretive interviewing (Kvale, 1996) using a semi structured interview format. The first section contained open-ended questions relating to individuals’ perceptions and experiences of owning and using mobile phones in everyday life, informed by Holt’s (1995) four metaphors of consumption. The second section explored individuals’ subjective experiences and opinions about m-marketing. Anecdotal evidence suggested that interviewees might have limited experience of m-marketing as this form of marketing is still evolving in Australia. As a result, short projective scenarios (Barter and Reynolds, 2000) were used to explore how the participants felt about future possibilities regarding m-marketing. These scenarios involved SMS-based m-marketing, since this is currently the most common form in Australia and elsewhere (O’Hagan, 2004; Grant and O’Donohoe, 2007). The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. The transcripts were reviewed by the researchers and analysed using constant comparison procedures (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) for emerging themes constituting consumption practices arising within the four consumption metaphors and in the additional dimension of m-marketing. Fifteen interviews were completed providing a wide variation of experiences of interest to the research. Fifty three percent were males and 47 percent were females. Participants were aged between 20 and 50 years old. Education ranged

from a basic vocational qualification, to professional qualifications. Eighty-five percent of the sample had some form of work, with 43 percent being in full time work.

### Discussion of the Findings

The exploration of the participants' lived experiences of their mobile phones provided insights into how these experiences can be construed as consumption practices. These findings are summarised in the first part of Table 1. They provide as an illustrative example of how Holt's (1995) metaphors can be used to explore individuals' experiences with their mobile phones as consumption practices that lie outside a marketing experience. However, the discussion in this paper focuses on the findings that helps to illustrate how Holt's (1995) typology can be extended to include a fifth dimension. This new dimension is called *Consuming as marketing experience* and explores how consumers understand, evaluate, appreciate and use m-marketing communications as everyday experiential consumption practices. These findings are discussed below and are summarised in Table 1.

The first practice involves *reactance*, which can be construed as a form of control over the intrusion by marketers. Statements along the lines of "There is enough marketing information available without having to get it on your mobile phone" were common place in the initial stages of interviews relating to marketing. Psychological reactance is recognised in the marketing literature (e.g. Clee and Wicklund, 1980; Kivetz, 2005). Additionally, there was a degree of suspicion about how marketers might start to use mobile phones for m-marketing communications, which seemed to be influenced by their experiences of marketing on the Web and other unsolicited forms of electronic direct marketing. "I wouldn't want my mobile becoming that type of technology, like my email where I'd just think 'blow it - I just won't even turn it on because I get too many marketing messages. [ID 011, female, 26-30]. "I wonder if some mobile phone database is being drawn up and I'm going to be inundated with SMS marketing." [ID 014, male, 51-60], "I would get annoyed if marketers had just collected my number somehow and sent me a message. I'd hate to receive unsolicited SMS messages." [ID 006, female, 36-40].

The second practice relates to the degree of *receptiveness to mobile value*. Once past their initial reactance to the notion of m-marketing, interviewees were able to reflect on ways that they might be receptive to m-marketing relationships that offer mobile value to enhance their mobile lifestyle experiences. In the literature on m-marketing, location based services are one of the ways that marketers can provide significant value propositions to their customers (e.g. Pura, 2005). A brief scenario of home or work-based SMS marketing was put to the interviewees as one of the ways that marketers can provide significant value to their customers. Responses suggested that they could be receptive to the mobile value of this m-marketing practice. "I don't think I would mind getting location specific SMS marketing if offers came through directly towards me in an environment that I was in if they had relevance to why I was there." [ID 011, female, 26-30], "I think it would be fine to get offers from shops that I use ... I often don't have time to pick up the paper, or might not be watching TV to learn about the sales or new lines so it would be great to get a reminder that a sale was on." [ID 014, male, 51-60].

Another m-marketing approach that provides mobile value is consumer-initiated-contact, where the individual makes contact with the organisation by SMS to seek specific information, such as information and special offers. A brief scenario was put to the

interviewees as to what this might entail. Again, there was a degree of positive receptiveness to this form of m-marketing in terms of how they might perceive the value of this practice. “It would be good to be able to SMS a service that could tell you what’s on or where to go in the area – say if you were away. If you could get an SMS to advise you of close events, such as what play is on tonight and a special offer on tickets.” [ID 011, female, 26-30].

**Table 1: Emergent themes of experiential consumption practices applying and extending Holt’s (1995) metaphors of consumption**

<b>Consumption practices</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
<b>Consuming as experience:</b> <i>how the consumer experiences consumption objects embedded in their social worlds that is structured by the interpretive frameworks that they apply to engage the object.</i>	
<i>Societal experience</i>	Mobile phones have just become a part of the way people experience modern life
<i>Facilitating a bridge</i>	Facilitating an individual’s continual availability to others to reduce separation distance or facilitate relationship management.
<i>Facilitating disconnection</i>	Facilitating a sense of disconnection when expectations of continual availability are not met.
<i>Intruder</i>	Permitting people to intrude on others in personal spaces not accessible previously.
<i>Life organiser</i>	Permitting people to organise their lives through the mobile phone
<i>How I feel for it / how it makes me feel.</i>	How the consumption practices make the person feel about their mobile phone – how the mobile phone makes people feel about themselves.
<b>Consuming as Integration:</b> <i>how a valued consumption object can become a constitutive element of a person’s identity or self concept.</i>	
<i>Social identifier</i>	How the individual perceives that they are identified to their social milieu through their mobile phone.
<i>Accessorise / accessory</i>	Making small modifications to the screen or the ringtones to reflect aspects of self / as an <i>accessory</i> to complement one’s mode of dress.
<b>Consuming as classification:</b> <i>how consumers use the consumption object to classify themselves in relation to relevant others. These practices build affiliation and enhance distinction.</i>	
<i>Social success</i>	Possession and display of mobile phones as signifiers of social success.
<b>Consuming as play:</b> <i>how people use the consumption object to engage in playful behaviour, for self-entertainment where the interaction has no ulterior end and for playful interaction with others.</i>	
<i>Plaything</i>	Using the object to amuse and occupy oneself through playing mobile games or altering settings on phone, filling-in waiting time. Playful interaction others through SMS messages, jokes etc to stay in touch.
<b>Consuming as marketing experience:</b> <i>how people use the consumption object to extend their experiential consumption to include marketing relationships.</i>	
<i>Reactance</i>	Experiencing an initial negative ‘gut reaction’ to the notion of receiving m-marketing, and a degree of suspicion about how marketers might start to use mobile phones for m-marketing.
<i>Receptiveness to mobile value</i>	Being receptive to m-marketing relationships that offer mobile value to enhance their mobile phone experiences such as SMS-based location services and customer initiated contact.
<i>Gifting access</i>	How the individual confirms the m-marketing relationship through permission giving, as well as determining frequency and timing of m-marketing communications.

Because of the amount of spam emails and the unsatisfactory practices of some marketers using electronic channels, people have become less likely to provide permission to receive marketing information. Moreover, laws have been enacted to protect consumers from such activity and marketers now require permission before they can send marketing material to

their consumers. Similar to Taylor and Harper's (2001) consumption practice of "gifting" discussed earlier, the interviewees reflected on how they might give marketers access to their information for m-marketing purposes. A consumption practice termed *gifting access* is used to cover both permission giving, as well as frequency and timing of m-marketing communications. The following statements suggest how they might provide this access. "I would go on a Website and fill in the little boxes of what I would be interested in receiving on my mobile phone and what I wouldn't". [ID 014, male, 51-60], "I would tick the box to receive SMS promotions from shops that I go to often. [ID 009, female, 26-30]. Frequency and timing of m-marketing communications are also important in this consumption practice (Barwise and Strong, 2002; Grant and O'Donohoe, 2007; Haghirian et al., 2005). In this current study, it appears that that less is better, as the following quotes suggest. "I would be happy to receive five or six SMS marketing offers each week." [ID 001, female 18-25], "I would only like two or three offers if I asked for promotions through the SMS." [ID 005, female, 18-25]. In m-marketing, poor timing can lead to less relevant offerings, or increase the likelihood of consumer irritation (e.g. Grant and O'Donohoe, 2007, Carroll *et al.*, 2007). Perceptions of the timing for receiving m-marketing are evidenced by the following quotes. "There's that boredom period on the train going home when I might like to receive SMS marketing messages." [ID 008, male, 18-25], "I would like to receive SMS marketing deals on Friday / Saturday night." [ID 009, female, 26-30].

### **Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research**

The findings suggest that interviewees are more likely to contextualise m-marketing as part of their everyday consumption practices with mobile phones as it evolves. While these are positive findings, they also provide insights into issues that researchers need to consider. *Reactance*, as a consumption practice suggests consumers' need for control over marketers' access to their mobile phones. While marketers may see the mobile as a "brand in the hand" (Sultan and Rohm, 2005), most individuals see it as a "friend in the hand" and that marketers' intrusion into this relationship could be problematic (Grant and O'Donohoe, 2007). The findings suggest that SMS based location marketing is perceived as having value and if used properly could be appropriated into individuals' consumption practices. However, organisations need to ensure that they fully understand just how often their customers want to receive marketing messages and when. Customer initiated contact was also viewed favourably in this study, and as a consumption practice it provides consumers with a degree of control over the contact. The practice of *gifting access* is also important. The online environment, with the possibility of choices about what to get was highlighted, as was the opportunity to provide this information in favourite shopping outlets. Based on the findings it is argued that Holt's (1995) typology of consumption be extended to include a fifth dimension, termed *Consuming as marketing experience* to provide for the consumption of marketing as an integral part of consumers' experiential practices with their mobile phones, or other mobile communication technologies.

Using the projective technique to explore consumer perceptions of mobile marketing limits the generalisability of the findings. Future research could revisit this area when mobile marketing is more widespread, as well as investigating how they might be operationalised for quantitative studies. Another limitation is the use of guided introspection (Nisbet and Wilson, 1977; Wallendorf and Brucks, 1993), where the participants were guided to think aloud about their experiences and interpretations about their everyday mobile phones consumption practices and to extend their introspections to m-marketing. While acknowledging these

limitations, the study suggests avenues of future research in the experiential consumption of ICT products, such as mobile phones, that offers a more holistic exploration of people's everyday consumption practices that includes the marketing domain.

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